

Post-governance Somalia beyond 2000: Prospects for a Nation without a State?

■ Kathleen Fahy

Unique in the modern world Somalia has been without a functioning central authority since January 1991 when the dictator Siyad Barre was overthrown. The struggle for power which followed has wreaked havoc in this turbulent country in the Horn of Africa. The country's institutions which were weak before the collapse of the state have been destroyed. Despite numerous attempts at peacemaking a plethora of regional and micro-level conflicts have eluded resolution. At the same time the country's traditional clan structure has facilitated local peace processes and the formation of district councils at local level has enabled development and localised peace to resume.

This paper written by Kathleen Fahy, Trócaire's Somalia Programme Manager since 1994, sets out the current political, economic and humanitarian situation and traces various conflicts and the attempts made at resolving them. It explains how the clan structure at one and the same time can be a source of conflict, consensus and perhaps in the future lasting peace. It highlights the challenges facing NGOs working in Somalia, the moral deficits in past interventions and suggests some useful lessons for future engagement.

The clan system: fostering conflict and consensus

Many outsiders view the Somali clan structure as an entirely negative phenomenon, which has fragmented an otherwise homogenous group of people, and prevented the formation of a modern nation state. Much is made of the fact that the country is composed of one people all sharing a common ancestry, with one language and one religion and presumably having a common world view. These are the elements, which if not necessarily prerequisites, are considered ideal cornerstones of the nation state, though many states have successfully achieved integration with considerably less homogeneity. However, all of Somalia's neighbours are composed of many different ethnic and religious groupings and the tensions which prevail in these countries are often linked to this diversity.

Freed from these other sources of conflict, why then has Somalia been unable to prevent the divisiveness which has occurred over the past nine years and has led to such widespread destruction? Part of the answer may lie in the fact that the Somali clan structure divides its people into distinctly separate entities, each sharing its own genealogy and specific history. This history was probably extremely important to the identity of scattered nomadic groupings, for whom the record of their place within the wider clan context provided not only their sense of belonging but also a framework which clearly set out their rights and obligations by virtue of membership within that specific group. This emphasis on clan/sub-clan identity inevitably leads to a sense of separateness and exclusion, which in other countries might be referred to as tribal, and which from a pragmatic perspective somehow negates the fact that most clans trace their lineage back to Samaale, thus claiming the same original common ancestor.

Prior to colonialism Somalia as we know it today did not exist. The region was inhabited by groups of clans, which co-existed independently. Each clan was composed of a collection of smaller related units who roamed the semi-arid terrain with their herds in search of water and pasture. Kinship was important and a complex system of reciprocal obligations and customs evolved around maintaining harmony within and between groups. Laws relating to land rights, access to water, punishment for wrongdoing and other issues were established over time. Being

constantly on the move there was little need to set up political structures or indeed to accommodate the wishes of another sub-clan particularly if that group was not closely related or if it challenged one's right of access to such key assets as grazing and water. Alliances among clans were not constant. They formed around specific issues and to meet immediate needs often breaking up when that need had passed and new alliances, often with the former enemy, were forged to meet the demands of constantly evolving situations. In the harsh desert environment pragmatism took precedence over loyalty. Such a lifestyle over generations led to the development of a rugged and individualistic world view, one that is not inherently disposed towards tolerance and compromise.

For the nomad the link with the land is of a more tenuous nature than that of the farmer. The latter identifies with one plot of land as his, from which he earns an (often uncertain) livelihood and which is central to his sense of identity. The fact of ownership, and transfer to his male offspring is for him a symbol of family continuity and a source of great pride and love. For the nomad who roams immense areas dictated by the seasons and the never ending search for water, these feelings are directed to his animals (particularly his camels in the Somali context) who are the source of his wealth, status and family pride. While the clans did identify one area of the territory, that is greater Somalia as their clan home, they freely roamed its vast reaches and did not form the mystical attachment to the land that is so pervasive among farming communities worldwide. Still a predominantly nomadic people this sense of everywhere and nowhere being home may partly explain the Somalis' difficulties in incorporating the concept of the nation state into their psyche. Interestingly during the past decade most of the fighting has derived from a desire to control the resources of the cities and ports rather than to take over lands. Only the Rahanwein clan, which has practised farming for generations, has had to struggle for the control of the land from which they extract a living.

Although chiefs were recognised as important, power was not vested in any one individual and was tempered by the need for consensus, at least among adult males. Most issues and disputes were settled through discussion and through recourse to tradition (*caado*) and customary rights (*xeer*). Chief among these was the concept of the *diya* paying group described by some as the most basic political unit in Somali society. This is the group of related clans or sub-clans bound by custom to pay compensation (*diya*) for a wrong done by one of its members to

another clan or conversely to revenge any wrong done to a member of its group. The erosion of customary law, and with it the power of the elders during this century which has seen periods of colonialism and socialism, has resulted in a vacuum with nothing to fall back on when the external systems of control imposed by centralised authority were removed.

Pre-colonial Somalia has been described as a pastoral democracy. Its system of governance evolved in response to a vastly different set of circumstances than prevail today and would certainly have required further major changes to respond to the challenges of the modern world. Nonetheless the checks and balances as well as rights and obligations within the traditional system ensured that justice was carried out, with the clan functioning as a welfare net to assist individuals who could appeal to law, kinship and religious duty for support and protection. Undoubtedly as in all societies there was abuse of power and privilege but it does seem as if the mechanisms for the reduction of such abuses were more strongly in-built in the Somali code than is commonly found elsewhere. The fact that power was dispersed and not centred on a single person or position and that negotiation took place in a public forum provided some safeguards to less influential members.

Sadly with the breakdown of traditional mores and constraints, power is now seized not negotiated and those with ambition rely on force and weaponry to achieve their ends rather than the oratorical persuasiveness for which their grandfathers were justly famous.

From divided colony to divided state

Colonialism was the Somali's first encounter with centralised authority. The country's history left it ill prepared for this new system of governance, which consolidated power and was quick to exploit the divisions inherent in the clan system. This manipulation and the selective arming of friendly clans, was later more extensively practised by Siyad Barre and has left a lasting effect on Somali society, accounting for much of the divisiveness which is so evident nine years after his overthrow. For instance, in the central and southern zones armed warlords are struggling

for power and vie for control over relatively small pockets of territory. Clan fiefdoms have been established each with its own ruling faction and with few exceptions the struggle for control at regional level has continued since 1991. The internal displacement of so many peoples forced to flee to their original clan territories for protection was both a symptom and a consequence of this divisiveness.

In late 1991 the north-west declared itself a separate state - Somaliland. Although this move has proved to be advantageous for the region by enabling it to extricate itself from the turbulence and chaos of the south and to establish a relatively peaceful environment for its people, Somaliland has not received any formal international recognition. The north-east has also set up a functioning administration (known as Puntland). It too has succeeded in bringing about some stability within its jurisdiction. Both administrations are attempting to rehabilitate basic services and provide hopeful examples of what can be achieved in a more peaceful environment. The southern and central zones remain unable to agree on any mechanism of self-government except through the power of the gun. Changing leadership in these regions merely reflects changing success on the battlefield.

To attempt to understand Somalia's present situation and to look to the future one has to look at its colonial legacy. In the late nineteenth century the territory occupied by Somali people was divided into five distinct regions. The northern area was colonised by the British, the south by the Italians, the French created a city state out of the port of Djibouti and its hinterland, the Ethiopians claimed the Ogaden region, while the British annexed part of the southern area bordering Kenya (the northern frontier region) as part of their then Kenyan colony.

Following independence in 1960 the north and south joined to become present day Somalia, while the three other areas remained separate and the focus of nationalist ambition and dreams of a greater Somalia. One of the major problems faced by the newly independent country was the task of uniting separate Italian and British heritages particularly in the administrative and judicial arenas. Different education systems (limited though they were) were also in place with English as the language of instruction in the north and Italian in the south.

The aforementioned fragmentation of the territory is symbolised in the national flag – a blue background with a five-pointed white star each wing of which represents one of the regions of greater Somalia. Evidence of how such dreams give rise to action was clear in 1977 when Somalia embarked on an

abortive attempt to bring the Ogaden area under its control. This effort resulted in famine, great loss of life and bankrupted the country.

The Siyad Barre years

By 1969 Somalia had experienced nine years of democratic self-government. That year following a military coup, Siyad Barre became president, a position he held for 21 years despite great internal opposition. During that period which coincided with cold war politics, Barre briefly followed a socialist path until the USSR abandoned him in 1974. This followed the seizure of power in neighbouring Ethiopia by the pro-socialist military leader Mengistu Haile Mariam. Seeing greater benefits for itself in supporting Ethiopia following the overthrow of (the US backed) Haile Sellassie the then USSR quickly transferred its support to Ethiopia, withdrawing funding, military and other support from Somalia overnight. Into the breach stepped the USA determined to maintain a foothold in this, at the time, strategically important corner of the African continent. Partly as a result of its strategic location in the Horn of Africa and Siyad Barre's skilful manipulation of the international donor community Somalia received massive amounts of foreign aid - very little of which was used to support the development process.

Following the Ogaden war huge quantities of food aid were delivered to the country supposedly to assist the refugees created by the war (whose actual numbers were greatly exaggerated) but which was instead used to support the regime's interests. Funds made available to various (often ill-conceived) refugee resettlement schemes were diverted to other purposes, sometimes unwittingly facilitating the theft of land from the Bantu farming communities in the river valleys, whose land was made available to supporters of the regime. In fact during the '70s and '80s Somalia became known as the graveyard of foreign aid because of the failure of the vast amount of aid received to effect any impact on the development process during that time.

The years of socialism bequeathed a mixed legacy. Some social services (education, health care and sanitation) were improved and a major literacy campaign conducted in the early '70s proved highly successful. The introduction of the Latin script enabled the standardisation of the Somali language, which until that time

had not been written down. However, state ownership of commerce with the nationalisation of businesses and agricultural enterprises led to a marked deterioration in agricultural production and was a factor in the eventual collapse of the banana export business, the country's second foreign currency earner after livestock.

But perhaps the most damning legacy of Siyad Barre's dictatorial regime was the divisiveness which resulted from the way in which he manipulated the clans, rewarding his supporters and severely punishing his opponents. The hostility and mistrust engendered during the last decade of his rule has lingered to this day and resulted in the splintering of an ancient force for social cohesion and individual protection, and of a system which in the past provided the basis of law and order.

Post-war external intervention

It is probable that the majority of the population approved the ousting of Siyad Barre in 1991. But the months that followed brought a huge escalation of war, massive displacement of the population, looting and banditry culminating in widespread famine in 1992 which led to a major humanitarian intervention. The decision by the Bush administration in the US to send in troops to oversee the distribution of relief supplies in late 1992 was in response to the prevailing lawlessness and the actions of the militias who refused to let the food supplies through to affected populations. Carried out under the auspices of the UN and called UNITAF (UN Task Force, code-named Operation Restore Hope) this aspect of the intervention proved successful. However attempts by UNOSOM 2 (which under US leadership took over from UNITAF) to disarm the factions proved disastrous and led to clashes between militias and the UN troops. In 1994 the killing of American soldiers, whose bodies were dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, led to the withdrawal of the US troops and very quickly thereafter the closing of the operation.

From the Somali perspective the UNOSOM era was a brief period of potential wealth and opportunity and heralded the beginning of the latest chapter of corruption and extortion in the country's history. In the absence of institutions capable of dealing with them, the UN and aid agencies negotiated with militia

movements and in the process granted them a recognition they did not deserve. Militias (and opportunistic civilians) were quick to exploit and manipulate foreigners who understood neither their language nor culture and were easy prey to threats of violence and disruption given the prevailing climate of insecurity. They also shrewdly noted the agencies' competitive elements, lack of collaboration, poor accountability and scant attention to detail in the chaos of the emergency and they instinctively knew how to manage these to their own advantage. The large UN contingent and the many international NGOs which flocked to the country following the harrowing television scenes of late 1992 all required housing, offices, and services. The controlling factions (who in most cases did not own the properties which they rented to the incoming foreigners) readily provided these at exorbitant prices. The factions also took advantage of the security fears of the aid agencies, securing lucrative contracts to provide protection and in the process getting their militia members onto aid agencies' payrolls. And so, funds provided through international humanitarian assistance helped to underwrite the continued costs of the war for the next few years.

Any honest assessment of this period of international intervention, must raise questions about a morality which assumes that aid must be delivered to innocent victims at any cost, even if in the process resources provided perpetuate the conflict and the very consequences which the aid agencies have come to alleviate. The bonanza which the UNOSOM presence meant to some Somalis, both military and civilian, has long come to an end but it has taken some time before realism has prevailed among local communities. They are only now coming to the realisation that the outpouring of generosity in response to their plight in 1992 is a thing of the past and that the international community has now largely forgotten them. But if we attempt to look at the situation through their eyes we can begin to understand their cynical attitude towards the international community and their deep suspicions regarding the aid agencies' motivations for working in their country. Their cold war experience of USSR v. USA self-interest and their role as pawns in that political interchange has informed their views on the west. The failure of the donor community to challenge¹ them and insist on greater co-operation and support in return for assistance during those crucial UNOSOM years has perversely led them to suspect that self-interest alone, governs external offers of humanitarian assistance.

Economic collapse and humanitarian crises

Somalia ranks as one of the lowest countries in the world under the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme. Average life expectancy is estimated at between 41 and 43 years. Under five child mortality exceeds 25% (or 129 per 1,000 live births in 1990 compared to an average for the rest of sub-Saharan Africa of 97 per 1,000). Adult literacy rates range between 14 and 17%. Primary school enrolment is between 13 and 16%. It is estimated that only about 10% of infants are immunised and about 10% of women are attended by trained personnel either during pregnancy or during childbirth. According to the UN *Human Development Report 1998* malnutrition is endemic in the country particularly in the south. The report goes on to state: "In almost any other country, any of these indicators would be considered a national emergency. Yet Somalia's prolonged humanitarian crisis has raised the threshold of what is considered an emergency there; only outright famine and deadly epidemics generate a humanitarian response. Nonetheless the chronically low levels of human development in Somalia constitute a long-term emergency for the Somali society, and indirectly for the international community."

Income levels for the majority of Somalis are low and have diminished greatly during this decade as any accumulated wealth was lost during the turmoil of 1991 and 1992 and the displacements that followed. Investment capital has not been available to assist in the rehabilitation of businesses or the reconstruction of buildings or other property destroyed in the war. The fraught political climate has discouraged private investment, except in the north which escaped the worst of the violence and where stability and a functioning administration provided an enabling environment for local business. Many northern Somalis living abroad continue to support their local economy through remittances and investment. A reconstruction process has begun in the cities of Hargeisa and Bosasso. Elsewhere in the country remittances tend to be used to meet immediate needs and little is available for investment.

The vast majority of the population are pastoralist or agriculturists, with livestock being the major export. Two all year rivers, the Juba and the Shabelle, irrigate the southern portion of the country, which means that this area has the potential, if

circumstances and finances permitted, to meet the entire food needs of the population. At present production rates the lower and middle Shabelle areas account for 94% of the country's maize production, while the Bay region produces over 60% of the entire sorghum production. Prior to the war, cash cropping of bananas on large foreign-owned plantations in the Juba and Shabelle valleys was a major income generator and labour provider. This business was almost entirely destroyed by the war and what remains today is largely controlled by warlords who use the proceeds to bankroll militia activity. Disparities within the agricultural sector also exist, with farmers dependent on rain-fed agriculture being much more vulnerable than that minority which currently has access to irrigation facilities. In fact rain-fed agriculturalists are probably the most vulnerable income group in the entire economy.

Except for the river valley basins and a narrow coastal strip along the Gulf of Aden, the rest of the country is mostly suited to pastoralism with goats and camels best suited to surviving the frequent droughts. The country's livestock trade particularly in the north suffered a major setback in 1998 following the ban on exports to the Gulf States in response to an outbreak of Rift Valley fever. This had severe implications for the pastoralists who provide thousands of animals to Saudi Arabia each year. In a good year when water and pasture are available, nomads throughout the country make a reasonable living. Not so dependent on regular cash they increase stock levels in times of plenty, trading or bartering to offset necessary expenses. For them wealth is still measured in camels.² But given the frequent droughts theirs is a precarious existence and much livestock has been lost over the past few years because of water and grazing shortages. The young men who tend the animals roam long distances to ensure their survival, and though sometimes constrained by insecurity are generally able to take their livestock to traditional grazing areas. Competition for water frequently leads to conflict and sometimes to loss of life.

Somalia's towns have grown enormously since 1991, because of the huge numbers of people forced to return to their clan's home territory given the clan hostilities which prevail. Bulla Xawa town in Gedo grew from a pre-war population of about six thousand to an estimated twenty to twenty-five thousand today. This may be higher than normal as many are people displaced from Mogadishu where they had settled during the Barre years, being from the same clan as the former president and therefore subjected to reprisals following his overthrow. These long term

displaced although they have integrated into the community have few employment or income generation opportunities. Poverty in towns is widespread, with the exception of the small business class. There is a heavy dependence on casual labour, and many rely for their income on the sale of firewood (with devastating environmental consequences), drawing water and petty trading. Those involved barely eke out a living and eat only once a day. It is an unrelenting cycle of hunger and deprivation for those caught in the poverty trap, and from which there are no prospects of escape. Huge numbers therefore despairing of the future in their homeland continue to seek refugee status overseas.

A relatively small group of businessmen profit greatly from the lack of government controls and taxation which results in advantageous terms of trade across international borders. Astute businessmen, with contacts throughout the Gulf Region and Eastern Africa, some have proved phenomenally successful in the trade and transportation areas. Trading across clan lines they transport their goods between the ports and the hinterland and have found ways of dealing with the various factions which control the routes and demand taxation. Known to be wealthy, social pressure demands that they shoulder some responsibility for their poorer kin, at least those within their sub-clan network. This they generally do. However there is a growing tendency to relegate clan responsibility for its weaker members to those international NGOs which are present. This is partly due to the fragmentation referred to above, which results in a diminishing sense of obligation and partly due to growing and endemic poverty. It is also a sign of increasing dependency which places responsibility for the welfare of its members on the international agency, whose duty it is to respond to the problem or at least such is the perception. Businessmen also often provide financial support to the local district council or faction, either for reasons of pressure or to secure business contracts or political favours in the future.

The quatt trade (a plant whose leaves are chewed releasing a bitter juice with a stimulating affect on the system) has survived the conflict and continues to be a lucrative business for those involved, with flights bearing the widely sought narcotic reaching the most remote corners of the country. A very extensive and efficient distribution network for the drug exists which is rarely disrupted by insecurity.

The pervasiveness of short wave radios is a particularly Somali phenomenon with every town having a number of battery or solar charged radios through which the population

communicates within and outside the country. Also in some villages enterprising businessmen have established satellite phone links. Communication without a state telephone or postal service is therefore not a major problem except in so far as the airwaves cannot offer privacy. Using the radio and their clan linkages for security, salaried workers transfer funds to their families in other parts of the country and receive remittances from relatives scattered throughout the world. And so using their ultimate safeguard or insurance, their clan membership, Somalis have introduced a flexible and innovative alternative to the banking system for the transfer of funds. It is difficult to estimate the value of remittances to the country as much of it is transferred through this informal network, but it is certainly considerable.

One other group of people within the country today merits mention. This is the relatively small number of educated people who stayed at home and did not seek asylum abroad when the country fell apart. In many cases they have succeeded in getting employment with international bodies operating in their clan areas. However because of the fact that jobs are jealously guarded even the best qualified person has difficulty in securing employment outside his/her clan territory and to accept such an opportunity is to accept a certain risk. Many do it of course but with limited effectiveness as they know that in the event of a problem they are far from the protection which in the current climate only their clan can provide. Even within the clan family those with steady employment are often the focus of jealousy as others attempt to usurp their position and the relatively large pay packet which accompanies it.

But it is a frustrating milieu for the educated Somali, who before the war had anticipated a good future and envisaged good prospects for his/her children. But clearly such dreams are not being realised in Somalia today. Instead their children like others of their generation are without schooling prospects and where schools do exist the services provided are very limited. Thus the prospects for the country's next adult generation remain poor. Despite their education they exert little influence on events and it must be frustrating to watch their society crumble and current history being shaped largely by uneducated, power hungry individuals who, intoxicated with the power of the gun, display an alarming immunity to common sense and persuasion.

Current political situation

Unprecedented in the modern world Somalia has now survived nine years without a central government or other structure capable of acting as an acceptable interlocutor on behalf of its people at either central, regional or international levels. Indeed in many places there has been a marked failure to agree on any local authority structure at district level. The lust for power, widespread availability of arms, constant shifting of alliances for short-term gain and interference from external interests have ensured that no single military leader has been able to emerge as victor or as a compromise candidate capable of uniting all clans or factions. A strong sense of egalitarianism within the national psyche encourages even the lowliest to challenge for positions of authority for which they are obviously unqualified. In addition the current extreme lack of accountability deepens a desire to control the few remaining major resources in the country. These factors, together with the breakdown of national identity into its component clan levels, have done much to perpetuate crisis and anarchy.

Numerous reconciliation conferences sponsored by the UN, and other international and regional bodies have not borne fruit. In the past these efforts have focused on the protagonists in the war, who have been brought together in the capitals of neighbouring countries and at locations within Somalia itself for long consultation processes attempting to reach consensus on the cessation of hostilities and the formation of a national government. Although frequently, agreements have been reached none have held and within weeks the various factions have reneged and embarked on new rounds of fighting.

This has finally led the international community to recognise that little can be achieved through such engagement with the warlords and that the process must be broadened to include other stakeholders such as civil society, religious and women's leaders, intellectuals and other emerging peace groups throughout the country. These groups have a far greater interest in a successful political outcome than the warlords, who have gained their status from fighting and who benefit enormously from the smuggling and general profiteering possible under current circumstances. While it is necessary to engage the warring parties in dialogue, doing so to the exclusion of other groups has served to legitimise their roles and to provide them with yet another platform for power-brokerage, the main agenda which they bring to the table.

The fact that as time has progressed the faction leaders are less able to control their own members means inevitably that they are not able to deliver on the promises made in foreign conference rooms where they are secluded from the realities of militia discontent and the diminishing support which many command within their clans. Their claim that they speak on behalf of their people has become more spurious with time as the Somali people, sick and tired of warfare and the disruption it has brought to their lives, seek only the cessation of hostilities and normality. Also the splintering of the clans into their sub-components with new militias being formed along very narrow sub-clan lines, with constantly shifting alliances and struggles for leadership has had an extremely adverse effect on the social fabric of the country. While this proliferation of militias has at various times eroded the power of individual warlords, it often only requires an attempt by another faction to exploit the situation to temporarily heal the rift. In this way the political jigsaw of alignments keeps changing and presents a confused picture to the outside observer.

Regional attempts at conflict resolution

At a regional level IGAD (the Intergovernmental Authority on Development) has taken an active interest in the resolution of the Somali conflict. In early 1998 IGAD came to the conclusion that the lack of progress towards peace and national reconciliation could be attributed to two inter-related factors.

- A lack of readiness on the part of faction leaders to leave aside personal interests for the sake of peace;
- The proliferation of initiatives⁵ from outside the sub-region often running counter to each other allowed the faction leaders to play one initiative off against the other thus enabling them to maintain the status quo.

In recognition of this stalemate IGAD resolved to undertake a new approach. This involved broadening the peace process to include civil society - elders, religious, civic and women's groups. Simultaneously it was decided to involve other external actors willing to support the process without engaging in parallel or

contradictory initiatives. IGAD also called on the international community to politically, diplomatically, and financially support regions in the country where there was a commitment to peace, stability and national reconciliation. This was called the peace dividend approach. The northern administrations in Hargeisa and Bosasso insist that despite their significant successes in bringing peace to their regions little practical financial support has been forthcoming. It is true that over the past few years more funding has been directed towards these areas than has been received in the southern zones, however the bulk of this assistance is in the form of emergency rather than developmental aid. Or put differently, it is a response to crisis rather than a reward for peace efforts.

Simultaneously the concept of the building blocks' approach to the resolution of the crisis of statehood was seen as the most realistic way forward. This envisaged the setting up of regional authorities which would become the main decision-making bodies at local level or the building blocks on which the nation state would be constructed. In theory, having a regional focus means that the potential for clan hostilities is reduced, although clearly not every region is homogenous and sizeable minorities do exist in many areas whose views should be accommodated. By building strong regional autonomy from the ground up the basis for discussions on the formation of a national government could begin. In this way limited self-government could be instituted with a weak central authority providing a framework to enable the management of issues of national concern. Many observers within and outside the country believe that this approach may offer the best opportunity for a country, which has had such a negative experience of centralised authority.

Two regions, Somaliland (in the north-west) and Puntland (north-east) already have functioning administrations which have succeeded in delivering stability within their spheres of influence. IGAD hoped that similar administrations could be established in the other three zones – central zone, Benadir (including the capital Mogadishu) and Juba Valley (which includes the port city of Kisimayo).

Ethiopia was mandated by IGAD to facilitate the reconciliation process on behalf of the group. Little has in fact been achieved. No further progress has been made in the formation of regional administrations. Indeed violence has escalated in parts of the south over the past eighteen months. Also major questions are now being raised over Ethiopia's ability to be a neutral facilitator of the process. The Ethiopian military

has twice made incursions into Gedo region in the south-west of the country, first in August 1996 to help the SNF (Somali National Front) in their struggle with the Islamic fundamentalist movement (the Alitihad). Ethiopia fears the growth of a fundamentalist power base along its borders and has long maintained that the Alitihad were responsible for terrorist activities in Ethiopia. The second incursion was in early 1999 this time in support of a breakaway faction within the SNF – and in opposition to the original SNF grouping led by General Omar Haji, which they had supported in 1996. Also in 1999 Ethiopia actively supported the RRA (Rahanwein Resistance Army) in their struggle to oust Hussein Aideed and his SNA faction who had controlled Rahanwein territory including the town of Baidoa since 1995.

The current Eritrean/Ethiopian war has also spawned increased military activity with both countries supporting different factions inside Somalia. Eritrea has provided arms to Aideed, and it is suspected that the OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) are being sheltered by and providing arms to Aideed. In retaliation and possibly also as part of some longer term strategy, the Ethiopians have supported those groups who are opposed to Aideed. Shifting alliances however have resulted in Ethiopian arms being used on opposing sides of the many separate conflicts which are taking place. Given the fluid and transient nature of relationships within the militia movements in Somalia, anyone providing military support risks this outcome.

Ethiopia's close involvement in training and arming various militias, in order to secure its own borders, raises serious questions about its ability to act as a regional peacebroker. No formal public complaint has yet been issued by any international body in response to this increasingly disturbing involvement by Ethiopia in Somalia. This fact is also an issue of great concern and perhaps a sign of the lack of interest in the plight of Somalia.

The recent initiative by President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti offers the latest and to date most positive intervention in the peace process. He has raised the issue at the UN Security Council and put forward proposals, which if implemented, may finally bring a resolution to the crisis. While challenging regional actors and the international community to finally address the Somali issue in a serious manner he has also chastised the warlords for their failure to solve their problems over the past decade. Charging the latter with holding the country to ransom in pursuit of their own selfish ends, he has insisted that the process must be broadened to include other stakeholders and

suggested that ultimately a war crimes tribunal should be set up. This time it appears that the intention to include the maximum number of participants in the process is not mere lip service and the first practical steps to put in place a mechanism to facilitate that participation are underway.

Under the auspices of IGAD, which has endorsed the proposal, a liaison committee has scheduled the first meeting to launch the process in December. It is intended that a framework, which allows for extensive consultation with Somalis both inside and outside the country, will be agreed. Following this process it is hoped that a transitional charter will be approved by the end of next year and a transitional authority will be in place shortly thereafter. In light of many failed attempts at peacemaking over the years this may indeed be ambitious. Co-operation from the warlords depends on how they perceive their role within the broader framework now being established, and their power to subvert the process through interminable wrangling while pretending to collaborate should not be underestimated. Nonetheless there is a genuine wish for peace among the populace at large, and a growing realisation that no one warlord is capable of forcing his way to the top. Thus the time may be right to move forward. A direction has at least been established and hopefully a momentum can be maintained. But to be successful it is vital that external powers support the process in a disinterested manner and do not once more attempt to manipulate the situation to their advantage.

Local governance

While much discussion regarding peace takes place at the macro level (and little of significance has been achieved) Somali communities are getting on with their daily lives, and finding ways to circumvent the problems encountered or to reduce their impact. This has been facilitated by locating decision making more and more at a local level and reducing interaction with the world to ever smaller circles. This narrowing of their boundaries does provide a sense of security and allows normality to prevail even if violence and insecurity plague a nearby town or settlement.

Local governance is conducted through the district councils, which date back to UNOSOM. Although imperfect they do

provide a point of authority within the community which is generally recognised, though this is often limited to the towns as at village level the influence of local elders still holds sway. In some cases the councils manage to sustain a small police force and judiciary. These bodies generally constitute the first line of authority through which NGOs operate at district level. How representative they are of their constituents is difficult to state as membership at any one time constitutes the supporters of the current successful faction. Given its close links with the local militia, the council inevitably sees its interests as directly served by the continued success of the faction which is currently in power.

Taking Bulla Xawa district in Gedo region as an example, over the past six years the council has been composed either of supporters of the SNF, or of the Alitihad (Islamic fundamentalist) or most recently of a breakaway group within the SNF. Throughout those years with a brief exception from mid-1997 to early 1998 the incumbent district council leader has been diverted by considerations of the other group operating in the background and by fears of threats to his leadership.³ Various reconciliation conferences (some supported by NGOs) have failed to resolve such crises as the real issue from the perspective of political leaders is their ability to maintain power.

Because of this fluid situation councils have not taken over the entire responsibility for local governance from the traditional structures which still play an active role in local affairs, especially in securing and maintaining peace. Elders also carry a major responsibility in representing their clans in negotiations and in building diplomatic relations. Membership in each group is not necessarily exclusive as a respected elder or sheikh may well hold a position within the council. Peacemaking efforts through these informal traditional structures have generally been more successful. A recent initiative entirely sponsored by the elders was successful in negotiating a locally acceptable compromise to end current hostilities between the two SNF factions in Gedo region when the political wing represented by the council was immersed in, or paralysed by the struggle. Unfortunately external interests intervened and thwarted the outcome resulting in yet another failure for moderate elements in the society.

In the vacuum created by the absence of state structures these two groups (clan elders and district council) are together taking over the role of local government and are doing so with some success, despite many constraints. In this way an alternative to centrist state structures is evolving which is accountable (albeit in

a limited way) to the local population. In a country where the functioning of central institutions has been a dismal failure and has resulted in deep suspicion of centralised authority one can envisage that once a more secure environment prevails these local bodies will be well placed to better serve their constituencies. Greater support on many levels, financial and training (on administration, their role as leaders and responsibility for the development of their communities, taxation, peacebuilding etc) will be required from external agents to help these bodies make the transition from the demands of war to the challenges of peace. In Gedo region Trócaire has made some efforts in this regard over the years. However, the rapid turn-over of membership within the council largely negated the impact of the training provided.

Supporting indigenous capacities for peace (generally identified as traditional leaders, women's groups, religious leaders, respected elders, and youth groups) is not easy. It requires a process of identification of individuals and structures. The harsh realities of life in Somalia today and the competition over meagre resources can lead to a short-term approach and a blinkered perspective on what is in the personal and communal good. With an uncertain future the individual perspective can triumph over the communal as the struggle to meet the needs of the day are assessed and negotiated. This is the unfortunate and understandable result of the divisiveness and distrust attendant on war and the breakdown of the social fabric.

Much work needs to be done to mobilise latent capacities for peace and to assist individuals and groups to move from a sense of passivity and helplessness to assuming an active role in the peacebuilding process. Time and energy must also be invested to enhance capacity, to build supportive structures and to facilitate the networking necessary to create peace. In a society like Somalia it is not easy to openly state one's opposition to the factions which dominate the local political scene and those who speak out do so at great personal risk.

Too often in Somalia, short-term goals have taken precedence and peacebuilding efforts have centred on crisis management, on negotiations to reduce active conflict, and on attempts to bring the leadership of all sides together with the ultimate objective of signing an accord. The fact that many leaders do not have the capacity to deliver has to date received insufficient attention. Not enough focus is placed on the longer term perspective, on the need to tackle the hostilities that ignited the conflict in the first place, and may yet be the cause of another outbreak in the future,

or on establishing networks and structural relationships capable of handling confrontations. At the same time where accords are signed there must be a proper system of communicating with all stakeholders to build rather than to declare peace and consensus. Conflict prevention may be the role which local peace capacities are best capable of managing, as every conflict, even if the root cause originated elsewhere, has some local dimension as the spiral of retaliatory violence affects an ever wider network of victims creating new reasons for its perpetuation. But this requires a long-term commitment which external agents have not been willing to make and in the current climate is genuinely problematic.

Trócaire in Gedo

Trócaire has operated an integrated rehabilitation programme in Gedo region in the south-west of Somalia since August 1992. Gedo region is predominantly Merehan although there are significant minority groupings particularly in the southern part and along the Juba and Dawa river basins. The controlling faction, the Somali National Front (SNF), has over the years, commanded considerable support in the region. Nonetheless though to a lesser extent than prevails in other parts of the south, the area has also experienced its share of instability and violence. The complex humanitarian situation of the past decade has depleted the already limited resources of the region, drained the energies of the people and severely strained normal coping mechanisms. Poverty is endemic and the conditions necessary to break the cycle (investment in agriculture, and the commercial sector, easy access to ports and other major trading centres, a peaceful environment with an enabling administrative structure, a sense of confidence in the future which might encourage greater investment by the Somalis themselves) are not yet present.

Trócaire's programme incorporates health (including water and sanitation), education and a credit component to facilitate women involved in small scale enterprises. Today a comprehensive health and education infrastructure surpassing pre-war levels in both scope and (it is generally agreed) in quality is in place. Emergency interventions to provide water for human and animal consumption have achieved their main objective in that most reasonably sized population centres now have access to clean water. Agricultural interventions in the past focused on food production under rain-fed and low level irrigation

conditions have provided a strong demonstration effect for farmers and agro-pastoralists in the area. Bearing in mind that the local population is mainly pastoralist and nomadic, the take-up on newly introduced agricultural techniques has been satisfactory. Nonetheless all of northern Gedo remains essentially a pastoral as opposed to farming zone. Four hundred and sixty-five women have received credit to extend or improve their small businesses and their success in this endeavour is evidenced by the high and timely repayment rates which have been adhered to over the past three years. This programme has empowered women to engage competitively in productive activities and enabled them to accumulate resources resulting in their decision to set up a savings scheme, itself a reflection of success and confidence in the future.

Much remains to be done by the population and the local leadership before the region can be considered appropriate for significant external investment. This is the position taken by the donors and the international community towards southern Somalia generally. The area is regarded as an area suitable for humanitarian action rather than longer-term developmental initiatives. In some respects this is an understandable position to take. However it does not take account of the fact that poverty and the competition for scarce resources exacerbate the struggle for power and compound the all too familiar problems Somalia faces. In particular a lack of employment opportunities enables the warlords to attract young men into the ranks of the militias, thus perpetuating the strife as young lives are lost and new reasons for bitterness and revenge are born. As representatives of the international community therefore northern NGOs would do well to bear in mind that there is room for continued positive engagement in Gedo and that a judicious handling of relationships and caution regarding the disbursement of resources can have a genuinely positive impact.

Trócaire's work in the health, education and credit sectors and the positive relationships built over the past five years bear testimony to the fact that co-operation can be established and significant progress made when genuine efforts are made at partnership and addressing the real needs of the people. Continued outside support however will be required for some time to come and in a climate of dwindling resources and aid fatigue generally there is a real danger that the progress made in the region and in other parts of Southern Somalia over the past decade may be lost. Hence the need to nurture such gains and to support emerging capacities for peace.

Conclusion

In a climate of competing demands for assistance Somalia has slipped from the conscience of the world at large. This is reflected in the near silence of the western media in the interval following the withdrawal of UNOSOM from the country. In the minds of the western world the tragedy of Somalia 1992 has been forgotten, superseded by other tragedies such as Rwanda, Korea, Kosovo as well as natural disasters such as El Niño. The heavy costs involved in delivering assistance and an ambivalent attitude towards the country given the sense that anarchy prevails and little of value can be achieved have militated against a major diplomatic and developmental response to the ongoing crisis. It may well be true that greater input is required in terms of financing, time and energy to achieve results in Somalia which are similar to other developing countries, but this is not a morally acceptable reason for abandoning the Somali people to their plight.

Attempting to ignore the problem will not only not make it go away, but may well be a factor in perpetuating the situation. For the warlords released from the inhibitions that might prevail were their activities more closely monitored, now act with impunity and with a clear disregard for the people they claim to represent. Perhaps if they perceived some future gain for compromise they might begin to look towards a peaceful future with a less jaundiced eye. At present a winner takes all philosophy prevails and no one is prepared to cede leadership to others as the accrual of power brings with it control of resources and the consequent ability to grant and withhold favours in the furtherance of one's own ends. Efforts must be made to give them a stake in a future peaceful Somalia, otherwise they will not be brought on board and will subvert any peace process that takes place.

And peace must prevail in Somalia before inter-clan trust can be re-established and before suspicions and bitterness can be left aside. In a country where memories are long and unsettled feuds are passed to the next generation the legacy now being prepared for tomorrow's leaders to resolve is a heavy burden. External actors also need to plan from the perspective of a generation, and acknowledge that the process of rebuilding Somalia will be long and arduous, whatever system of governance eventually emerges.⁶ Quick fix solutions will not hold and will merely complicate the process by building up a record of failure. No panacea exists for putting this divided land and its people back together again.

Processes will have to be worked out on an ongoing basis and in response to the ever-changing dynamics of this highly charged situation. On reflection other seemingly intractable conflicts have been resolved or at least minimised to the extent that peace can prevail and normal life continue. On further reflection we must acknowledge that such successes have not been achieved without considerable and sustained efforts from external bodies. We also owe Somalia that chance.

Footnotes

- 1 Frequently the donor community has acquiesced when faced with threats from the community with regard to job demands, payment for labour and security services, hire of transport etc. Anxious to avoid retaliation if the demands of an armed individual were not met, agencies often paid excessive rates or accepted unwanted conditions rather than jeopardising their programme or the lives of their staff. Such actions became precedents for later demands when a group or individual sought some advantage and indicated a readiness to use force to achieve that end. One example of the difficult and demanding environment in which aid was delivered relates to a tendering process for a well digging contract in Gedo region in which a man placed a hand grenade on the table declaring it to be "his tender for the job". It went off killing two local officials and injuring another. Frequently a clan family views a specific position within the aid agency as theirs by right. This implies automatic replacement by a relative in the event of the original incumbent leaving the post and protracted discussions are required to defuse hostility when the claim is not accepted.
- 2 Gedo region is home to the largest population of camels anywhere in the world.
- 3 In late 1996 Kenya brokered an agreement between the Hawiye rivals in Mogadishu. It was never implemented. In 1997 Ethiopia sponsored the Sodere conference which offered a brief hope of success as it managed to get all factions, with the exception of Aideed, involved. The Cairo conference of late 1997 reached an agreement which set out plans for the formation of a government of national union. A follow up conference scheduled to take place in Baidoa to take the initiative through its final stages never took place.
- 4 This concept was initially developed at a conference in Naivasha, Kenya, sponsored by the European Union and facilitated by the London School of Economics. Participants included Somali intellectuals, external actors in Somalia and other foreign observers of the Somali situation.
- 5 Encouraged by UNOSOM in 1993 a district council was formed in Bulla Xawa. The chairman was a strong SNF supporter. From 1994 onwards the fundamentalists' (Alitihaad) movement gradually consolidated power and formed a parallel administration, which was totally opposed to the council. In mid-1996, with support from Ethiopia, there was a major military effort to rid the area of the Alitihaad. For a short period (October 1996 to June 1997) the Alitihaad actually controlled the council in Bulla Xawa before being overthrown in mid-1997. The original (SNF supported) council then returned and maintained control until a split within the SNF resulted in the formation of a new council in mid-1999 and the ousting of the original chairman who has now fled the country. Throughout most of 1998 a growing rift within the SNF dominated political considerations.

- 6 During the 1990s the EU has been the major donor to Somalia. This appears to be about to change. Without a recognised government Somalia will be unable to sign the next Lomé agreement (a special trade, aid and political relations agreement between the EU and 71 {ACP}African, Caribbean and Pacific nations), and will therefore lose out on support for reconstruction and development. In addition not being able to sign the agreement means that Somalia will not benefit from future preferential trade agreements with the EU and risks losing its political status as a member of the ACP group of states. Hence the call by NGOs for a provision in the next ACP-EU convention which would allow Somalia to sign it at a later date should a recognised government emerge and for aid funds to be released for use in Somalia in the absence of a central government. As the Somali people have no political representation in the negotiations it is vitally important that other EU-ACP states raise these concerns during the negotiations (source: Scottish Somali Action, correspondence, July 1999).